



Bickers, R. A. (1992). *Changing Shanghai's "mind": publicity, reform, and the British in Shanghai, 1928-1931*. (pp. 33 p). (China Society occasional papers), (26). <http://hdl.handle.net/1983/904>

Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication record in Explore Bristol Research](#)  
PDF-document

## University of Bristol - Explore Bristol Research

### General rights

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies. Please cite only the published version using the reference above. Full terms of use are available:  
<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/red/research-policy/pure/user-guides/ebr-terms/>

**Changing Shanghai's 'Mind'**  
**Publicity, reform and the British in Shanghai,**  
**1928-1931**

A lecture given at a meeting of the China society  
on March 20<sup>th</sup>, 1991

*by Robert Bickers*

# **CHINA SOCIETY OCCASIONAL PAPERS**

No.26

1992

Published June 1992

© Robert Bickers

## What was the Shanghai Mind?

I am sure that you have all heard the legend of the Shanghai park sign that read “No dogs and Chinese”. Perhaps you have seen photographs of fake signs with exactly this wording, until recently a notice just inside the park entrance retold the story. I’m sure you all know that the legend is untrue: no such sign ever existed with that wording. It is, however, doubly symptomatic of a problem. Firstly the Chinese were barred from entering the Settlement’s parks before 1928. Secondly the aggression and contempt explicit in the legend’s wording were seen by many in China and abroad to be the public attitude of Britons in Shanghai towards the Chinese. In 1928 the *North China Herald* lamented that it had “probably caused more adverse opinion against Shanghai than any other incident.”<sup>1</sup> “Rather rough I call it,” said a Briton in one of Lenox Simpson’s novels, “If I were one of them I should kill some foreign devil just to equalize matters.”<sup>2</sup>

At the annual meeting of the foreign ratepayers of the Shanghai Municipal Council [SMC] in April 1928 a resolution was introduced to remove the ban.<sup>3</sup> A speaker in favour of the motion outlined its necessity:

The world has been told that all we foreigners of Shanghai are Die-hardes of the most virulent and bloodthirsty type; that we are all suffering from a chronic species of Brain fever known as the “Shanghai Mind” and that we spend our time deliberately insulting our Chinese friends and our

---

<sup>1</sup> *North China Herald* [NCH], 14/4/28, p. 53. A transcription of the modern sign can be found in Paul Theroux, *Riding the Iron Rooster: By Train Through China* (Harmondsworth, 1989), p. 126.

<sup>2</sup> Putnam Weale, *The Eternal Priestess* (London, 1914), p. 26.

<sup>3</sup> The SMC was the council of the Shanghai International Settlement, the historical result of the amalgamation of the British and American Concessions in Shanghai in 1863. Originally situated to the north of the Chinese city of Shanghai it came to include the city’s most famous landmark, the Bund. The SMC was run rather like a town council in Britain, with elected councillors, although it was dominated by the big British trading firms. The French Concession was ruled by a separate Concession Municipale Francaise.

money on the up-keep of huge orchestras to which no one ever listens.<sup>4</sup>

In 1930 Lionel Curtis, a professional busy-body from the Royal Institute of International Affairs at Chatham House, was more specific: the “Foreign community here is... the victim of a legend created by a journalist.”<sup>5</sup>

That journalist was Arthur Ransome, sent briefly to China by the *Manchester Guardian*.. He’s better known for works other than *The Chinese Puzzle* in which he coined the term “The Shanghai Mind” for the British citizens of “the Ulster of the East”. He described their thinking as anachronistic, thoughtlessly imperialistic and bellicose.<sup>6</sup> Ransome’s was not the only hostile public voice. “It is high time that the six thousand odd British in Shanghai faced the situation like the British gentlemen they claim to be” announced Bertrand Russell and Dora Black, for instance, but Ransome did most damage.<sup>7</sup> His work was well-timed: the Nationalist Revolution was at its peak in 1927, the Shanghai Settlements were on the defensive and the 20,000 British troops of the Shanghai Defence Force were the focus of world-wide media and public attention. The troops were also, it was claimed, alerting the public in Britain to the “obstinacy of Shanghailanders” in letters home.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> The speaker was G.E. Marden, *Municipal Gazette*, 19/4/28, p. 159c.

<sup>5</sup> Shanghai to Legation No29 (after this just, for example, Shanghai No29), 13/2/30, enclosing NCDN, 13/2/30, FO228\4283\5 69.

<sup>6</sup> A. Ransome, *The Chinese Puzzle* (London, 1927), pp. 28-32. He was not popular in Shanghai, see a hostile review of his “prejudiced and superficial” book in *NCH*, 24/3/28, p. 506.

<sup>7</sup> In a letter to *The Nation and Athenaeum*, 5/2/27, p. 619.

<sup>8</sup> Lampson to Barton 29/1/28, FO228\3779\15 15e. My own reading of the papers of a score of military men does not bear this statement out. Most did not think to question British policy whilst those that did considered it far too lenient and appeared to want a full scale war. Some with doubts about the situation in China found that the turn of events combined with life in the treaty port atmosphere caused them to change their minds. see, for example, W. Agnew papers, Letter to Mother, 3/4/27, Imperial War Museum. Other nations sent extra troops to Shanghai but it was largely a British show, Nicholas R. Clifford, *Spoilt Children of Empire: Westerners in Shanghai and the Chinese Revolution of the 1920s* (Hanover, New England, 1991), pp. 186-96, 227-31.

Most of the British in China led ordinary, conservative lives. Lives that could have been led by the British anywhere abroad; in much better style than in Britain but rarely ostentatiously out of the ordinary. They were too busy or too uninterested to get involved in treaty port politics and of those who did the genuine extremists among them were few.<sup>9</sup> Indeed when not being reviled for being die-hards the Shanghai British were usually being reviled by literary visitors for being suburban, boorish and vulgar.

The problem with their society was that it relied too much on what now looks too much like racial discrimination for comfort. Chinese critics described the employment, educational, parks and health policies of the Shanghai Municipal Council [the SMC] as being so biased.<sup>10</sup> “No decent Occidental”, wrote the *North China Daily News*, “has throughout all this turmoil, ever been anti-Chinese”; but such blandness was incapable of refuting the facts of individual behaviour and institutional and social segregation.<sup>11</sup>

“Examples” of the Shanghai “Mind” can be found in many places - notably in Municipal politics. There was the inadequate response to the 1925 shootings in Shanghai of Chinese demonstrators by Settlement police.<sup>12</sup> A foreign ratepayers’ vote

---

<sup>9</sup> The “treaty ports” were those Chinese cities opened to foreign trade, initially as a result of the treaties settling the Opium and Arrow Wars in the mid-nineteenth century. Within most of these cities the British, and latterly the other foreign powers, were given “concession” areas in which they proceeded to exercise sovereign rights and in which they developed governing institutions of varying kinds. This was linked to the Chinese granting of extraterritoriality to recognised treaty powers, whereby foreign consuls, and not the Chinese courts, had legal jurisdiction over their foreign nationals.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, *The China Critic*, 20/3/30, pp. 268-9.

<sup>11</sup> In the 1929 Economy Committee report it was admitted that the “employment of Chinese in the Council’s service is at present inadequate”, *Municipal Gazette*, 9/2/29.

<sup>12</sup> The Shanghai Municipal Police, or SMP, was controlled by the SMC. It was organised and run on British lines but included personnel of Chinese, Russian, Sikh and other nationalities. It only had jurisdiction within the International Settlement, separate police forces patrolled the French Concession and Chinese areas.

in 1926 announced the desirability of Chinese participation in the government of the Settlement but then fudged the issue of implementation.<sup>13</sup> In April 1927 a resolution to open the parks was postponed and much more attention was given to Council plans to scrap the Municipal Orchestra.<sup>14</sup> The chairman of the Shanghai Club claimed that opening the parks would leave “all these spaces purposefully and deliberately crowded with the scum of this city and there would be no room for us or our real Chinese friends”. Another speaker objected to the idea of raising the ban as being “a resolution of surrender and fear” and he demanded “no compromise.”<sup>15</sup>

There were such books as Rodney Gilbert’s popular and strongly offensive *What’s Wrong With China*<sup>16</sup> (no question mark, by the way), Shanghai lawyer Auxion De Ruffé’s *Is China Mad?*,<sup>17</sup> and the journalism of O.M. Green in the *North China Daily News* and H.G.W. Woodhead in the *Peking and Tientsin Times* which all gave plenty of evidence of die-hardism. Nationalism was frequently described as “a new form of Boxerism” and the *North China Daily News* was among the many advocates of foreign military intervention in 1927.<sup>18</sup> In itself that was not an unnatural political position for them to take. It was, however, frequently quite offensive in tone and embarrassing in view of Britain’s stated policy towards China. The Conservative

---

<sup>13</sup> F.L.H. Pott, *A Short History of Shanghai* (Shanghai, 1928), p. 293. The history of Chinese representation, or lack of it, can best be found in pp. 113-30, *The Report of the Hon. Richard Feetham, C.M.G., to the Shanghai Municipal Council Vol.1* (Shanghai, 1931).

<sup>14</sup> *NCH*, 16/4/27, p. 120.

<sup>15</sup> *Municipal Gazette*, 14/4/27, p. 147.

<sup>16</sup> Published in London and New York, 1926. There were reprints in London and New York in 1927, and again in New York in 1932.

<sup>17</sup> Published in Shanghai in 1928 and very favourably reviewed in the *NCH*, 28/4/28, p. 170.

<sup>18</sup> *North China Daily News and Herald*, *China In Chaos* (Shanghai, 1927), p. 1; *The Foreigner in China* (Shanghai, 1927), pp. 40-41.

government's Foreign Secretary, Sir Austen Chamberlain, in his "December Memorandum" of late 1926, renounced any conception of foreign tutelage in China and argued for "the essential justice of the Chinese claim for treaty revision."<sup>19</sup>

### **Why did it matter?**

It is easy to exaggerate both the extent and the effects of this noisy conservatism; Chinese polemicists, of course, made a habit of it. There was much to criticise, so much that one historian has described "the ramifications of the imperialist mind" as "the barbed wire thread which bound together the whole fabric of foreign imperialism in China and made it so unbearable to... Chinese nationalism."<sup>20</sup>

1928 marked a new stage in the history of the British presence in China. An increasingly strong nationalist government was in the making after the collapse of the Wuhan regime at the end of 1927.<sup>21</sup> It controlled those parts of the country that most interested the British. Equally importantly, as the British Minister, Sir Miles Lampson (later Baron Killearn), wrote: "the deliberate drive against the foreigner, and especially against the British, seems to... almost have ceased entirely."<sup>22</sup>

The suspicion had been growing in diplomatic circles throughout 1927 that the British community in Shanghai was happily doing very little under the shadow of the Defence Force to deal with its outstanding political problems, notably relations with the Chinese community in general.

---

<sup>19</sup> The full text can most easily be found in Sir Frederick Whyte, *China and Foreign Powers: An Historical Review of their Relations* (London, 1928), pp. 51-58.

<sup>20</sup> A. Feuerwerker, *The Foreign Establishment in China in the Early Twentieth Century* (Ann Arbor, 1976), pp. 100-101.

<sup>21</sup> C. Martin Wilbur, *The Nationalist Revolution in China 1923-1928* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 155-63, 170-76.

<sup>22</sup> Lampson Diaries, 31/12/27.



There is a more familiar diplomatic history of the next 4 years - concerned with formal treaty revision, but there were also attempts by diplomats and others to reform the public behaviour of the British in China whilst there was also a considerable amount of work done by the unconverted explaining and justifying that very behaviour. It was a long drawn out struggle over public images, one that still reverberates. Most books written about the Shanghai settlement have fallen down heavily on one side or the other.<sup>23</sup>

### **Changing the Shanghai Mind**

A variety of forces were brought to bear on the Shanghai community. Lampson used personal contacts with businessmen to impress on them the need for change, such as Warren Swire, who was usually the Minister's houseguest when he went to Beijing. The Legation, at the Foreign Office's behest, strove to work through the Shanghai Consul-General in attempts to restrain the treaty port press and urge reform on the British dominated Shanghai Municipal Council.<sup>24</sup> There were some private attempts

---

<sup>23</sup> The following works deal with Sino-British relations in this period or else, directly or indirectly, with the theme of this lecture: Nicholas R. Clifford, "A Revolution is Not A Tea Party: The "Shanghai Mind(s)" Reconsidered," *Pacific Historical Review*, LIX (November 1990), pp. 501-26; Clifford, *Spoilt Children of Empire*; Edmund S.K. Fung, *The Diplomacy of Imperial Retreat: Britain's South China Policy, 1924-1931* (Hong Kong, 1991); James L. Huskey, "The Cosmopolitan Connection: Americans and Chinese in Shanghai during the Interwar Years," *Diplomatic History*, XI (1987), pp. 227-50.

<sup>24</sup> The Council was first organised in 1854. A Committee of Roads and Jetties had been formed in 1845, two years after the Settlement was established, but it took the chaos of the Taiping Rebellion (1851-1865) to prompt the foreign consuls to set up the Council. It was intended that it would oversee road building, sanitation, policing activities and other quotidian functions required by the Settlement. By 1928 the Council consisted of five British members, two Americans and two Japanese, elected on a limited franchise by a proportion of the foreign rate[ayers. This was the result of informal arrangements which had emerged over the years rather than a fixed quota system. The Councillors were elected annually, but elections were frequently unnecessary as the city oligarchs parcelled out the seats among themselves. A good history of the SMC and its role in the development of modern Shanghai has yet to be written.

to influence people, such as the informal Sino-British discussion groups with British officers, businessmen and other non-missionaries, organised by the Methodist missionary Ronald Rees, but these were on too small a scale. It was Shanghai's *public* face which needed altering.<sup>25</sup>

"Public opinion at home will judge by concrete acts or the absence of them. It is for Shanghai to provide the concrete acts", wrote Lampson to Consul-General Barton in the latter part of 1927. "Time is short", he concluded.<sup>26</sup> Barton was rightly felt to be too sympathetic to the Shanghai cause.<sup>27</sup> Lampson had to cope with this recalcitrance and the more go-ahead attitude back in London. He was still quite ready on occasion to defend the British in the treaty ports:

What they are being asked to do is to prepare to sacrifice what they have built up, and hand it over sooner or later to what there is every reason to suppose will be a corrupt and incompetent administration.

he wrote to the Far East Department Head towards the end of 1927, but the response was unsympathetic, what they were: being:

asked to do is surely rather to adapt themselves at long last to the new conditions which they have for so long refused to recognise and to secure their present position and future prospects by embarking on a frank policy of sincere co-

---

<sup>25</sup> Rees, Circular Letter, 30/3/32, Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Archives, South China, fiche 582. Although Shanghai was the China headquarters of most of the British mission societies its missionary population is not the subject of this lecture. It was far smaller than the British commercial population and was not representative of the "Shanghai British" although in 1927, as a result of their evacuation from the Chinese interior the city was overflowing with missionaries. Many of them were shocked by the attitudes and behaviour of the "Shanghailanders" (as they called themselves) but many shared their conservative political views about the Guomindang and the treaty port status quo.

<sup>26</sup> Lampson to Barton, 1/11/27, FO228\3677\15 69. See the rest of this dossier for the evidence of Barton's intransigence on the matter.

<sup>27</sup> So much so that he was later kicked upstairs to be Minister to Abyssinia.

<sup>28</sup> Lampson to Mounsey, S/O, 4/11/27, FO228\3677\15 69.

operation,<sup>29</sup> with the Chinese on a basis of equality.

Other officials on the spot were also very critical, such as the first commander of the Shanghai Defence Force, General Duncan.<sup>30</sup> The pressure of opinion led Lampson to feel that “an almost anti-Shanghai drive may develop.”<sup>31</sup> British officialdom had to be delicate. The December Memorandum and the Chen-O’Malley agreements handing the Hankou and Jiujiang concessions back to Chinese administration, were not popular and relations between the business communities and the diplomats were difficult.

### **Encouraging Reform Parks and Councillors**

The first real measure of reform took place in early 1928 when three Chinese councillors were finally allowed on to the council. This was the measure approved in 1926 but then suspended and Barton had been loathe to initiate the Consular meetings which had to be held in order to confirm this constitutional change.<sup>32</sup> The measure was accompanied by provisos that the number would be increased at some point; possibly within a year promised Lampson.<sup>33</sup>

The parks issue was the next major test. Despite a campaign against the proposal in the letter columns of the *North China Daily News* the ban was lifted and the parks opened to ticket-buying Chinese in 1928. Some later memoir-writers were still bitter about this decision; contemporary news reports were happier about the results, although the commercial fishing

---

<sup>29</sup> Mounsey to Lampson, S/O 18/1/28, FO228\3883\8 69.

<sup>30</sup> Gen. J. Duncan to Lampson, S/O 16/1/28, FO228\3804\16 25a.

<sup>31</sup> Lampson to Barton, to Shanghai, No46. 29/1/28, FO228\3779\15 15e.

<sup>32</sup> See the correspondence in FO228\3779 dossier 69.

<sup>33</sup> He was speaking to Yu Xiaqing [Yu Yah-ching], Lampson Diaries, 13/3/28.

activities of the more enterprising Chinese visitors caused quite a rumpus until a fishing licence system was organised.<sup>34</sup>

In 1929 there was pressure for a further increase in the number of Chinese councillors. It was stoutly resisted by the foreign councillors who praised their Chinese colleagues in public but complained about them in private. The Chairman was also fearful that an increased number of Chinese councillors would “some fine day” join votes with the Japanese and “swamp the white vote on the Council.”<sup>35</sup> “They have some difficulty in realising... that... “there is a world elsewhere”, besides Shanghai or even China” complained the Acting Consul-General.<sup>36</sup> The Foreign Office was driven to complain that the tone of the rebuff was “injudicious” and that foreign opinion might well provoke the Chinese.<sup>37</sup>

In January 1930 the non-Chinese councillors bowed to this foreign and Chinese pressure, and announced the intention of the Council to propose an increase. A packed ratepayers meeting however, was roused by a British lawyer, Ranald G. Macdonald into overthrowing the motion. He spurned the critics of “die-hards” who believed that “foreigners out here still painted themselves with woad”, claimed that the problem lay in the absence of a sincere Chinese desire for co-operation, exhorted the meeting not to “wantonly” sell “our birthright” and finished with a sizeable quotation from the Qianlong Emperor’s famously dismissive address to George III as proof of Chinese arrogance.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Arch Carey, *The War Years at Shanghai 1941-45-49* (New York, 1968), p. 158; *NCH*, 9/6/28, p. 43, 11/8/28, p. 233; *China Journal*, September 1928, p. 156, October 1928, p. 259.

<sup>35</sup> Minister in Shanghai to Legation, No13, “Minute of a meeting with Mr Arnhold”, 24/5/29, FO228\4045\8 69.

<sup>36</sup> Garstin to Lampson, S/O 16/6/29, FO228\4045\9 69.

<sup>37</sup> FO to Lampson, 16/5/29, FO228\4045\15 69.

<sup>38</sup> Shanghai No103, 22/4/30, FO228\4283\27 69B.

“Shanghai Mind Reveals Itself” announced the *China Critic*.<sup>39</sup>

The Consul-General panicked and suggested the forcing through of the change by the Consular Body in Shanghai and the Diplomatic Body in Beijing.<sup>40</sup> An emergency meeting was called instead and intense lobbying engaged in to warn the British community of the seriousness of the matter.<sup>41</sup> An exceptionally large meeting of ratepayers was drummed and bussed up (in special transport to beat a bus and tram strike), Japanese voters packed the meeting, and the resolution was passed by a bored majority before Macdonald was allowed to finish a repeat speech.<sup>42</sup>

This little crisis shows just what the diplomats were up against, a majority of the British population in Shanghai who were worried about their futures and were opposed to any measures which would weaken their positions. These were the “small Treaty Port people”, as Warren Swire characteristically termed them.<sup>43</sup> This included those owning land and property, or working for, or running, businesses or services based in the settlement that were not part of the expatriate British community of London based firms. Their investment in Shanghai was more personal and immediate than that of ICI, Jardines, British American Tobacco [BAT] or the Asiatic Petroleum Company [APC]. They felt that they were being betrayed and their hostility embraced the Council itself; sometimes directly. Supporters of a motion to allow the press into Council meetings attacked the

---

<sup>39</sup> *China Critic*, 24/4/30, pp. 394-5.

<sup>40</sup> Shanghai No71, 17/4/30, FO228\4283\18 69B.

<sup>41</sup> Brenan to Lampson, Private, 22/4/30, FO228\4370 30B; Shanghai No103, 22/4/30, FO228\4283\27 69B.

<sup>42</sup> Shanghai No113, 5/5/30, FO228\4283\37 69B.

<sup>43</sup> G.W. Swire to John S. Scott, 27/1/33, JSSI 3/8.

Council's "veil of mystery and secrecy" for precisely these reasons.<sup>44</sup>

This distrust was a problem. The French Concession was run absolutely by the French Consul-General (although between 1928 and 1932 effective control was devolved into the hands of the Shanghai underworld organisation, the Green Gang [*Qing bang*]<sup>45</sup>) but the British were proud of the great example of Municipal self-government they felt the Settlement to be.<sup>46</sup> The consequence of even this limited democracy was a lack of outright control over affairs in Shanghai. Indirect control and interference was feared and resented, "Beware of any vaguely worded promises - Beware even of statement made by senior members of the Council's staff" warned the *Standard* of the press motion in 1930.<sup>47</sup>

### Consular Plottings

There was certainly cause to beware of the British Legation and Consul-General's long-standing attempts to influence the

---

<sup>44</sup> *Municipal Gazette*, 17/4/30, p. 151, E.F. Harris was the speaker.

<sup>45</sup> Brian G. Martin, "'The Pact with the Devil': The Relationship between the Green Gang and the French Concession Authorities, 1925-1935", *Papers on Far Eastern History*, 39 (1989), pp. 94-125.

<sup>46</sup> The Council, though, was oligarchic and consistently dominated by the big firms. In 1930, for instance, we find Neilage Brown, Swires Shanghai Manager, announcing to Lampson that: "It was only fair that if [later on] the Council should co-opt another member, it should be he that should have it." This sort of attitude caused a great deal of complacency among both ratepayers and Councillors. In 1935 only 3,900 out of a foreign population of 28,000 had a vote. Few of these bothered to vote in the elections which only ever occurred when Consular and other plotting failed to stop excess candidates standing. For example there was no election in 1927. At the notorious 1930 ratepayers meeting Ranald Macdonald's rabble rousing left the councillors speechless, it: "came as a complete surprise to the Council, who were confident that there would be no serious opposition to the resolution and had made no preparation for such a Contingency." They were so taken aback that none of them thought to speak against Macdonald. "SMC Election: Minister's Meeting with Mr Brown", Minister's Tour Series No49, 6/2/30, FO228\4283\7 69B; F.C. Jones, *Shanghai and Tientsin with special reference to foreign interests* (London, 1940), p. 7; Shanghai No103, 22/4/30, FO228\4283\27 69b.

<sup>47</sup> *Municipal Gazette*, p. 153, G.E. Marden.

composition of the Council. Garstin in 1929 attempted to persuade some candidates not to stand so as not to split the vote and prevent the informal quota of five British candidates being elected; he also wanted the present five councillors to stay. The candidates were twice called to his office and asked to agree among themselves who should withdraw, without success.<sup>48</sup> Although loathe to repeat the exercise the following year because of criticisms of this “plotting,” Garstin had to; even Lampson joined in to dissuade Swire’s Manager from standing.<sup>49</sup> Luckily for all concerned, except Chairman Arnhold who polled last, probably because of a newspaper-inspired revolt against the recent District Court Agreement with the Chinese (which saw the rendition to Chinese control of the courts dealing with Chinese and sino-foreign cases).<sup>50</sup> The new Consul-General Brennan could announce that he was pleased with the new Council as “Four out of the six British members are old personal friends of mine and I think that all six will work well together and with me.”<sup>51</sup> Arnhold’s, as it turned out, temporary departure, was welcomed, as he was felt by the Legation to be a too much of a die-hard.

There were other reasons for avoiding elections that year. It was feared that “one of the electoral cries was going to be over this question of closing the local cabarets at 2a.m., the present hour being 4 a.m.. It would be hard to conceive an issue which

---

<sup>48</sup> Shanghai No51, 23/2/29, FO228\4046\7 69B; Shanghai No53, 25/2/29, FO228\4044\8 69B.

<sup>49</sup> Shanghai No10, 3/2/30, FO228\4283\6 69B; Shanghai No4 2/1/30, FO228\4283\1 69B; Minister’s Tour Series No49, 6/2/30, FO228\4283\7 69B; SMC Chairman H.E. Arnhold suggested Lampson should appeal to the 3 extra candidates to withdraw “on patriotic grounds”. Minister’s Tour Series No34 25/1/30, FO228\4283\8 69B.

<sup>50</sup> Fung, *Diplomacy of Imperial Retreat*, pp. 231-32. The history of the Shanghai Mixed and Provisional Courts is the subject of a forthcoming monograph by Tahirih Lee.

<sup>51</sup> Brennan to Lampson, S/O, 13/3/30, FO228\4283\15 69B.

would make Shanghai look worse in the eyes of the world”, correctly concluded the report.<sup>52</sup>

### The Press

Consistent attempts to influence and change public opinion, or at least the expression of it, can also be shown by the relations between British officialdom and the newspapers. Chinese political opinion viewed the *North China Daily News* as an official British mouthpiece.<sup>53</sup> This was unfortunate as its reputation for die-hardness was thoroughly deserved. It was also hostile towards British policy. The editor, O.M. Green, was frequently called upon to mend his ways on both counts. In 1929 it was banned from the Chinese mails for a period for criticism of the Guomindang and Green was advised to tone things down by the Consul-General. “His case is pretty hopeless - He doesn’t take in the obvious”, wrote Lampson;<sup>54</sup> privately he felt “the man is an ass.”<sup>55</sup> Green continued writing and working unofficially and officially for the interests of the Shanghai British long after 1930, when he retired, or was retired. Lampson used all his influence to “get a different and better type to take his place” to the point of seeing the proprietor to impress on him the “need for a change of policy by the paper”. He had already received a deputation containing Lionel Curtis and Swire’s N.S. Brown suggesting a better man.<sup>56</sup> In this he seems to have succeeded, at least temporarily.<sup>57</sup> Three years earlier Austen Chamberlain had persuaded Geoffrey Dawson, editor of the *The Times* to seek

<sup>52</sup> Minister’s Tour Series No34, 25/1/30, FO228\4283\8 69.

<sup>53</sup> Wellington Koo, *Memoirs*, Vol 2, p. 46; *China Critic*, 23/1/30, p. 75.

<sup>54</sup> See dossier 22z 1929, FO228\3987; Lampson Minute on Shanghai No133, 22/4/29, FO228\3987\5 22z.

<sup>55</sup> Lampson Diaries, 19/1/30.

<sup>56</sup> Lampson to Selby, to FO No40, 19/1/30, FO228\4370 22L; Lampson Diaries, 18/1/30.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas Ming-Heng Chao, *The Foreign Press in China* (Shanghai, 1931), p. 50.



Lampson's help in getting a correspondent for the paper to replace the biased Green.<sup>58</sup> Whilst in January 1930 Lampson dined with Fraser of the *The Times* and "gave him a little lecture about the advantages of taking a somewhat more sympathetic attitude" in his messages home to the paper.<sup>59</sup>

They were tougher on W. Bruce Lockhart, editor of a bi-weekly paper called *The Showdown*, which was a self-described admirer of yellow press journalism, printed on yellow paper. It was said to "exploit the craving for scurrilous abuse of the Chinese, which exists on the part of a section of the Foreign Community in Shanghai" and had a circulation of 1,500. It was a one-man show, obnoxiously racist, even by the standards of its time, and concerned with furthering Lockhart's business interests. On Lampson's orders Lockhart was hauled up in front of the Consul-General after complaints from the Nationalist Minister for Foreign Affairs. After a further offence he was found guilty of contempt of court relating to some comments, under the heading "The Savagery of the Rice-Fed Mind", about a Chinese judge.<sup>60</sup>

The Legation also did its best to keep particularly delicate stories out of the press, especially the Chinese papers. Incidents involving British soldiers and the deaths of Chinese were particularly troublesome.<sup>61</sup> The *North China Daily News* itself exercised a good deal of self-censorship to protect the image of the British community.

### **Public Relations and Propaganda**

The Shanghai Municipal Council was quite aware of its image problem; and as well as initiating some measures of reform

---

<sup>58</sup> Chamberlain to Lampson, 11/4/27, FO800\260.

<sup>59</sup> Lampson Diaries, 20/1/30.

<sup>60</sup> Shanghai No202, 25/7/30 "List of Foreign Newspapers in Shanghai", FO228\4189\3 22; Shanghai No256, 6/12/29, FO228\4040\3 61L.

<sup>61</sup> For example see Lampson Diaries, 20/10/30.

it paid close, if slow, attention to publicising its case and activities. The Legation had ambivalent feelings about these public-relations campaigns. In June 1927 a Shanghai Publicity Bureau was set up to disseminate pro-SMC and anti-Communist propaganda. It built on the work of the Constitutional Defence League, a “non-political” and international group set up to publish anti-Communist propaganda in Chinese to counter the efforts of the Comintern. This was founded in late 1925 and had taken its message to factories and mills in Shanghai and to audiences in Manchester, London and Bradford but was “moribund” by 1928.<sup>62</sup> In a page long letter to the *North China Daily News* in 1927 on “The Need of Making Facts Known”, Rodney Gilbert suggested changing the function of the League to the dissemination of propaganda about Shanghai abroad, to counter misconceptions and the erroneous views held abroad about the Shanghailanders.<sup>63</sup> The Bureau was originally a quasi-Municipal body, with offices in the SMC administration building and an SMC representative on its committee.<sup>64</sup>

It published and circulated a *News Bulletin* which attempted to lay out the facts about the Settlement, extraterritoriality and the consequences of treaty revision as Shanghai saw them. The aim was to explain the position taken up by the British community and to alter the meaning of the die-hard label for the better. Lampson initially recommended “Close, but unofficial liaison” to

---

<sup>62</sup> The Constitution and an Introductory newsletter can be found in Butterfield and Swire, Shanghai to John Swire and Sons (London, No38, 24/4/26, JSSII 2/5; more information can be found in Butterfield and Swire, Shanghai to John Swire and Sons, London, No36 18/3/27, JSSII 2/6, and *NCH*, 6/2/26, p. 235, 20/3/26, p. 521; on its demise see, for example, *NCH*, 4/8/28, p. 200.

<sup>63</sup> *NCH*, 16/4/27, p. 114.

<sup>64</sup> Its objects were: “to explain the functions of municipal government, and to foster a Sino-Foreign public-opinion in favour of the gradual development of the Shanghai administration... to counteract subversive propaganda, and [will] endeavour to create an atmosphere of friendship and cooperation between Chinese and foreigners” *NCH*, 11/6/27, p. 473.

the Consul-General.<sup>65</sup> But Swires refused to distribute the *News Bulletin* because of its “critical, if not unfriendly tone towards matters Chinese.”<sup>66</sup> By early 1929 this was also the feeling of the Chinese, who made requests to the SMC to suppress it.<sup>67</sup> The calibre of those involved was not rated too highly. Huntley Davidson, the Director, had taken its case to Britain and the States in 1929, representing the British and American Councillors and the Chairman of the British Chamber of Commerce in a “personal capacity” that was funded by British firms. He presented a Memorandum calling for the establishment of a free-port, under League of Nations mandate, at Shanghai. This was not well received. Huntley Davidson, reported one Swire director, appeared “to be doing the Shanghai Community incalculable harm”. At the Royal Institute of International Affairs the impression he left behind was that “if that is really the frame of mind and outlook of the Shanghai Community, Heaven help them.”<sup>68</sup>

The Bureau’s publications in English were a little too dense to have any mass appeal. A similar group was more successful in Tianjin. There the Tientsin British Committee of Information published a series of *Memoranda* from 1926 throughout the 1930s. These were mainly articles reprinted from newspapers concerning matters communist before 1928 and extraterritoriality afterwards. They did take time out in 1927 to deal themselves

---

<sup>65</sup> Garstin to Aveling, 5/10/28, Lampson minute on same, FO228\3883\3 69k.

<sup>66</sup> Butterfield and Swire, Shanghai to John Swire and Sons, London, 31/8/28, JSSII 2/7.

<sup>67</sup> Garstin to Aveling S/O 28/1/29, FO228\4046\2 69k; Hewlett to Lampson 26/3/29, FO228\4046\4 69k; Lampson Minute, 8/7/29, FO228\4046\10 69k.

<sup>68</sup> FO No524 15/5/29, FO228\4045\11 69; FO to Shanghai No17, 16/5/29, FO228\4045\15 69; [?] to G.W. Swire, 10/5/29, Swire Add.15, Directors Now Out East. It was also felt that he was rather too interested in land interests as they affected the Land Investment Co. he worked for, and in whose offices the SPB had been given space after 1927, Hewlett to Lampson, 26/3/29, FO228\4046\4 69k, Teichman minute, 15/11/29, on FO228\4046\12 69k.

with “A Mischievous Slander”, when “An Old Lie”, about the Shanghai parks, reappeared.<sup>69</sup>

### Lie Correcting

To correct “old lies” the SMC tried other methods. Rodney Gilbert had suggested that all foreign residents should write letters outlining the “real situation” to their friends, or public representatives at home. The Tientsin memoranda were designed for this, as were the many reprints of newspaper articles one comes across in the archives. In 1928 an ad-hoc committee of ex-SMC councillors living in Britain was appointed “to keep a lookout for reports about China and to follow up every misstatement with a prompt correction”. Their first act was the correction of a *Morning Post* story about the parks ban. In June 1928 they vented their spleen against a *New Statesman* article.<sup>70</sup> The *North China Daily News* also made a habit of reprinting particularly absurd stories culled from the home press such as one from *The Daily Express* in 1928, for example, entitled “Notorious City of the Far East”. This was written by a correspondent with “hazy ideas of Sax Rohmer’s Chinese underworld and opium den life flitting through” his mind.<sup>71</sup>

Rodney Gilbert chose another medium for passing on the message. In 1929 he wrote a novel, *The Indiscretions of Lin Mang*, in which a bandit turned mandarin describes his life. The story was an excuse for Gilbert to plug his usual message about the venality and cruelty of Chinese political life. At the end of the novel we find the ex-bandit has been made chief negotiator on the Chinese side in the forthcoming extraterritoriality

---

<sup>69</sup> Tientsin British Committee of Information, *Memorandum No19*, March 1927.

<sup>70</sup> *NCH*, 25/2/28, p. 294; *NCH*, 9/6/28, p. 396.

<sup>71</sup> *NCH*, 14/7/28, p. 82. The weariness of the headlines speaks volumes, “As others see us: Typical Misdescription of Shanghai”.

negotiations.<sup>72</sup> Lenox Simpson's novels, especially the trilogy which finished with *China's Crucifixion* in 1929 left a similar impression.<sup>73</sup> The thrillers of James Bennett were furiously anti-nationalist and pro-treaty port whilst the romances of Louise Jordan Miln came to the same conclusion, despite her sinophilia and her critiques of "Occidental bad manners."<sup>74</sup>

The SMC itself did not create an official publicity post until late 1931 in response to ratepayers' pressure, at least 6 years after it truly began to need one. The initial idea behind the move was the usual one of informing and influencing *foreign* opinion;<sup>75</sup> but the Council came to feel that the overriding need was for better publicity in China because the existing inadequate system led to "misunderstandings" on the part of the Chinese.<sup>76</sup> After all it was only from 1930 that the *Municipal Gazette*, annual reports and other Council material had been published in Chinese translation.<sup>77</sup> The press post was abolished as an economy measure at the end of 1936 but had dutifully released communiques and greeted visiting foreign journalists with "a short history of the Settlement, a statement of its financial position, and an outline of Council activities". It also produced sections on the city for guide books.<sup>78</sup>

### **The Feetham Report**

The climax of these moves by the SMC to be seen to be acting could be said be the *Report* commissioned from Judge

---

<sup>72</sup> Rodney Gilbert, *The Indiscretions of Lin Mang* (London, 1929).

<sup>73</sup> Putnam Weale (the pseudonym of Bertram Lenox Simpson) *Wang the Ninth, the Story of a Chinese Boy* (London, 1920), *Her Closed Hands* (London, 1927), *China's Crucifixion* (London, 1929).

<sup>74</sup> See, for example, *The Vintage of Yöu Yee* (London, 1931), p. 67.

<sup>75</sup> *Municipal Gazette*, 17/4/30, pp. 151-56.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 10/7/31, p. 313, "Council Minutes".

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 23/8/30, p. 355.

<sup>78</sup> *NCH*, 28/7/31, pp. 109, 122; *Shanghai Municipal Council Report for the Year 1936 and Budget for the Year 1937* (Shanghai, 1937), p. 27; *SMC Report 1935*, p. 262.

Richard Feetham in 1931. Feetham was instructed to advise the Council “with a view to assisting them in formulating some constructive plan or scheme” which would satisfy Chinese aspirations and protect business interests.<sup>79</sup> Feetham’s report has been rightly described as “still born” and “a monumental statement of the case against any material surrender of the Shanghai citadel.”<sup>80</sup> It was a tremendous and mighty irrelevance but it was good publicity. It looked like a concrete act and it could be held up to foreign opinion as proof of a desire to compromise on the part of the city’s rulers. In fact the spirit of the investigation and report clashed with the spirit of the extraterritoriality negotiations then underway between Lampson and Wang Zhengting. Feetham’s sponsors and supporters felt that Shanghai should be excluded from these negotiations.<sup>81</sup> In later years some businessmen privately felt that Lampson’s negotiations were a betrayal of the good will that motivated the SMC’s launching of the Feetham investigation.<sup>82</sup> As has been shown this narrowness of outlook was no small problem.

### **The “small people” get organised**

Outside of the municipal structures the China Association and the Shanghai British Chamber of Commerce were the accepted media through which commercial Shanghai made its feelings felt in letters to the press, ministers and Foreign Office, and in meetings with officials and politicians. But there were other attempts, explicitly avoiding these established channels, to

---

<sup>79</sup> *Report of the Hon. Mr Justice Feetham, C.M.G. to the Shanghai Municipal Council, Vol.1*, p. 5.

<sup>80</sup> Sir Erich Teichman, *Affairs of China* (London, 1938), p. 162.

<sup>81</sup> See, for example, Brenan to Lampson, 12/2/30, FO228\4370 84.

<sup>82</sup> See, for example, J.R. Jones to A.S. Henchman, 12/2/52 and Henchman to Jones, 29/4/52, Hongkong and Shanghai Bank Archives, S16.1 “Personalities and Narratives”.

mobilise public opinion in Shanghai and to represent it within the city, at the Legations and at home.

British treaty port hostility to official policies achieved organisational form in the Shanghai British Residents Association or BRA. This was founded in late 1931 in response to fears about the progress of the extraterritoriality negotiations and the hysteria whipped up over the disappearance and death in Chinese military custody of a 19 year old Briton, John Thorburn.<sup>83</sup>

This was not a new phenomenon at a time of crisis. A Shanghai Property Owners Association was formed in September 1927<sup>84</sup> and in August a “Shanghai Fascisti” (a deliberate reference to Mussolini’s “Blackshirts”) had been organised, to “support the authorities in the present crisis, and to act in the interests of the entire community”. There was a great rush to enrol.<sup>85</sup> It is fairly obvious from letters and diaries that disillusionment with the Foreign Office, Legation and business elites was thorough and the appeal of a paramilitary organisation tapped into a rich vein of subdued violent discontent.<sup>86</sup> So much so that Council leader Fessenden took pains to urge great caution on the organisation for fear of incidents.<sup>87</sup> It was one of the precursors of the BRA, its leadership was mainly British and at least one local journalist was actively involved in both.<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>83</sup> *NCH*, 17/11/31, pp. 230, 240.

<sup>84</sup> *NCH*, 1/9/27, The membership was international, but as most property in the settlement was owned by Britons this was rather a nicety.

<sup>85</sup> *NCH*, 20/8/27, p. 323.

<sup>86</sup> Shanghai Detective R.M. Tinkler, for example, wildly wrote to his sister that “Locally if no action is taken soon, foreign guerillas will start terrorising the Chinese troops and force a conclusion”, 28/3/27, Tinkler Papers, IWM.

<sup>87</sup> *NCH*, 1/10/27, p. 14. It seems to have fizzled out in 1928 as the situation stabilised, but survived into the new year, *NCH*, 14/1/28, p. 53.

<sup>88</sup> Arthur de C. Sowerby, editor of the *China Journal*, and self-styled explorer, was replacement leader of the Fascisti and Committee member of the BRA, *NCH*, 14/1/28, p. 53, *NCH*, 28/12/32, p. 498.

The BRA set out to organise and inform. It had a committee in London and paid political and publicity agents there. Our old friend O.M. Green filled the publicity post with his customary tact and gravity.<sup>89</sup> Its leading lights certainly saw themselves as representing the smaller interests. Woodhead was its second chairman, and Ranald G. Macdonald, that notable rabble-rouser, was Vice-Chairman from 1932 and Chairman in 1934. Its reputation has not been helped by the charges of early pro-Japanese sympathies which have come to stick.<sup>90</sup>

### **The Fruits of Fraternisation**

There were changes elsewhere. Businesses and other groups also made changes. In and after 1927 many Britons in the Customs, in Missions and in business who could not, or would not, adapt to the changing situation were eased or forced out. Companies like Swires began to get quite tough with managers who were slow at changing. Warren Swire and N.S. Brown showed the effect individuals could have as well as the problems of dealing with a community which was not inclined to be liberal in nature and from which change was only grudgingly forthcoming.<sup>91</sup> In 1929 when Warren Swire was in despair over

<sup>89</sup> NCH, 30/11/32, p. 334.

<sup>90</sup> For many of its members Japan's actions in China after 1931 were what the British should have done in the years after 1925. This is certainly the stance taken, in effect, by Woodhead in his *A Visit to Manchukuo* (Shanghai, 1932), pp. 106-107; after 1937 this attitude changed. See also S.L. Endicott *Diplomacy and Enterprise: British China Policy 1933-1937* (Manchester, 1975), pp. 28-30 and Ann Trotter, *Britain and East Asia 1933-1937* (London, 1975), pp. 26-7.

<sup>91</sup> Swires had been conciliatory, by British standards, ever since 1925. The Director in the East had been urged by Warren Swire in 1926 to "preach the gospel of concession to Chinese sentiment on every possible occasion" so that British opinion in the east "may be already reconciled to a large extent to the absolute necessity of concessions to China". Later that year he was instructed to make sure that the then Shanghai manager T.H.R. Shaw got on to the SMC; which he did. But Shaw was a die-hard and far from educating the British he spent much energy on the anti-communist educational activities of the Constitutional Defence League, G.W. Swire to C.C. Scott 21/5/26, 22/10/26, Swire Add.15 DNOE; Butterfield and Swire, Shanghai to John Swire and Sons (London, No's 1, 21, JSSII 2/5.



the conservatism of the British community, the conservative Shaw was replaced by Brown, who was “purposefully sent to Shanghai by his firm in order to get on to the Council and try to get a real move on progressively.”<sup>92</sup> So progressive was he that he was described as “not a *persona grata* with many influential members of the British community” who, as was later written, “have regarded his fraternization with the Chinese with some suspicion.”<sup>93</sup> Even Lampson was cynical about the Swire efforts.<sup>94</sup> Brown was very involved with Lionel Curtis and his activities connected with the Feetham report. He was also instrumental in such things as getting the Shanghai Paper Hunt Club to make an effort to enrol more “Chinese gentlemen riders” as a *quid pro quo* for the rescinding of restrictions on hunting in the countryside around Shanghai. He even raised this question at a meeting with Chiang Kai-shek.<sup>95</sup> The BRA seems to have been responsible for Brown losing his council seat in the 1933 SMC elections.<sup>96</sup> He came bottom of the poll in what looks like a delayed judgment on his “fraternization”. Swires did not support the BRA and Brown was not a member. Other individuals tried hard too. BAT’s Archibald Rose got very excited in 1930 with “a campaign about peace in China”, by which he meant reconciliation with the Nationalists and the use of “Moral Leadership” as the keystone of British policy. This would involve “close and constant Personal relations” with the Chinese. Rose was a noisy supporter of Lionel Curtis and was distrusted by

---

<sup>92</sup> G.W. Swire to J.K. Swire, 23/2/29, Swire Add.15; Minister’s Tour Series No 49, 6/2/30, FO228\4283\7 69b.

<sup>93</sup> Garstin, Shanghai No18, 3/2/30, FO228\4283\6 69b; Brennan to Lampson, S/O 30/10/30, FO228\4134\40 3.

<sup>94</sup> Lampson Diaries, 17/1/30, 20/1/30.

<sup>95</sup> Enclosure in Brenan to Lampson, S/O, 30/10/30, FO228\4134\40 3.

<sup>96</sup> NCH, 29/3/33, p. 486.

the Legation, which felt he was a “hot-air artist”. But his rhetoric was at least more helpful than that of many others.<sup>97</sup>

These things mattered at the time. Indifference to social intercourse or fraternisation with the Chinese and language study, segregationist rules about club and Masonic lodge membership, the parks, and higher grade employment in municipalities and business firms, whilst not special either to the British, nor to the British in China, made for bad publicity. China, after all, was not a colony.

Now these things also mattered because they were bad for business. Britain’s foreign competitors appeared to have the edge on the British when it came to training. Indeed at one point there were more foreign than British students learning Chinese at the Shanghai British Chamber of Commerce’s language school.<sup>98</sup> The Germans were an increasing worry. Their staff were better linguists and their sales organisations better adapted to changing patterns of trade. Chief among these was the increasing direct trade between British and Chinese firms, cutting out middlemen. Companies were also phasing out their compradores and the parallel structures necessitated by compradoric trade. Chinese employees were certainly cheaper and they were better suited to dealing with the new generation of Chinese businessmen.<sup>99</sup>

During the Great War, and after, a wealthy Chinese bourgeois class had come into existence in Shanghai<sup>100</sup>; much of

---

<sup>97</sup> Rose to Lampson, 15/5/30, enclosing Memorandum on “China”, FO228\4134\263.

<sup>98</sup> “The Chamber’s Language School”, *British Chamber of Commerce, Shanghai, Journal*, August 1930, p. 219.

<sup>99</sup> The comprador was the Chinese agent of a foreign company. He oversaw the Chinese business, customers and staff, of the company and, historically, played a vital role in the development of foreign trade. By the 1920s and 1930s, with the acceleration of direct trade links the Compradore was becoming an anachronism and his often parallel business structure a luxury.

<sup>100</sup> Marie-Claire Bergère, *The Golden Age of the Chinese Bourgeoisie 1911-1937*, (Cambridge, 1989).

it was foreign educated and unwilling to acquiesce in the accepted relationship with foreigners. Chinese steamship passengers for example wanted better accommodation and were prepared to pay for it and were no longer ready to put up with the minor and other indignities of what was effectively segregation. Even the wealthier Chinese patients in mission hospitals in the interior were demanding better standards.

It seems that the British elite quickly learnt the value of friendly social intercourse with the Chinese elites in the 1930s. Indeed, in 1937 the Bank of England's representative in Shanghai felt progress on the issue great enough and important enough to include in his report home.<sup>101</sup> They had more in common, it was rightly felt, as businessmen and social leaders, than any political or ethnic differences could overshadow. This made discrimination at the elite level foolish, as well as offensive.

Club life was an area in which some moves were made. A successful International Club already existed in Qingdao and ran smoothly.<sup>102</sup> A new International Club was set up in Nanjing in early 1929 and provided a forum in which the Miles Lampson and the Consul-General could get extremely drunk with Nationalist worthies.<sup>103</sup> Lampson admitted that even the Legation, before his arrival, "saw very little" of the Chinese and set out to right this.<sup>104</sup> Later an Anglo-Chinese club was formed to lubricate relations over regular dinners.<sup>105</sup> Shanghai was slower about this, although there was an International Recreation

---

<sup>101</sup> W. Kirkpatrick, "Notes for remarks to advisory committee Export Credits Guarantee Department on 2/11/37", p. 13 "I was glad to find among the younger heads of British firms, a definite new life pro-Chinese social movement and definitely improving not only social but also economic and business relations with the Chinese", BOE G1/296 31.

<sup>102</sup> Lampson Diaries, 4/2/28.

<sup>103</sup> Lampson Diaries, 7/12/28, 11/9/29.

<sup>104</sup> Lampson to Chamberlain 23/2/27, FO800\260 ff256.

<sup>105</sup> Lampson Diaries, 13/11/29, 20/12/29.

Club and at one stage even O.M Green was advocating admission of Chinese to the Shanghai Club.<sup>106</sup> In 1931, in recognition of the fact that:

social contact between Chinese and foreigners is, except in a small way, nonexistent, and it is, indeed, somewhat difficult for foreigners and Chinese to meet socially,

ambitious plans were floated for an International Club which would take over the premises of the Majestic Hotel. Nothing seems to have come of what the *North China Daily News* described as “one of the most important innovations in the social history of Shanghai.”<sup>107</sup> Actually it appears that the owners of the site were just desperate to sell having already been turned down by the ratepayers to whom they’d offered it as a new civic centre.<sup>108</sup> There was a Union Club of China but its struggle to exist as more than a pleasant idea was shown by its need to move premises in 1928 to try and attract more users on their way home after work.<sup>109</sup>

### **Education and Restraint**

There was always the next generation. In 1934 the Department of Overseas Trade [DOT] published a pamphlet entitled *China: Notes on Some Aspects of Life in China for the Information of Business Visitors*. The genesis of this booklet is interesting. In June 1932 Louis Beale, Commercial Counsellor at Shanghai, wrote to Sir Edward Crowe at the DOT about the then missionary E.R. Hughes who “while in England on leave intends to spend some time exploring the possibilities of closer intimacy between Shanghai British and Chinese”. He was encouraged in

---

<sup>106</sup> Lampson Diaries, 9/3/28.

<sup>107</sup> *NCH*, 21/7/31, p. 86 The speaker was N.L. Sparke. *NCH*, 14/7/31, p. 42.

<sup>108</sup> *Municipal Gazette*, 6/3/31 p. 90, 13/3/31, p. 97, 15/4/31, p. 174, 22/4/31, pp. 182-186.

<sup>109</sup> *NCH*, 31/3/28, p. 534; 7/7/28, p. 18.

this by the new Swire manager in Shanghai and by G.E. Hubbard, then political agent of the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank, who had prepared a memo describing “a somewhat nebulous project for the inculcating into younger minds of a somewhat better conception of, and attitude towards, the Chinese and China.”<sup>110</sup> Various approaches were suggested including, for instance, “popular lectures” possibly “at the China Society.”<sup>111</sup>

Beale favoured a handbook of some sort and thought the project vital for British trade. Hughes’ own aims were a little less mercenary. He wanted the DOT pamphlet to stress “the importance of this new cultural approach to China, not merely for business reasons but more because there is some point in being a gentleman.” (A phrase which echoes the call of Russell and Black in 1927).<sup>112</sup>

Whatever the aim, the DOT was favourable and anxious that any document would be under their control “in order to prevent any tendency to go the other extreme, namely, one of sentiment, overlooking the realities of certain Chinese delinquencies.”<sup>113</sup> Sir John Pratt at the Foreign Office was most enthusiastic, (and so he should have been, for at this moment his brother, better known as Boris Karloff, was playing the title role in *The Mask of Fu Manchu*, one of a series of films which, through the invention of certain Chinese delinquencies, did little

---

<sup>110</sup> Beale to Crowe, Private, 13/6/32, BT 60/31/5.

<sup>111</sup> “Memorandum by Mr G.E. Hubbard”, pp. 2-3, BT 60/31/5/1.

<sup>112</sup> Hughes to Crowe, 15/12/32, BT 60/31/5/65. This was characteristic of Hughes who had given up evangelical missionary work because he felt unable to refute suggestions that the mission enterprise, as it stood, was the “running dog” of Imperialism, Council for World Mission Archives, China, Fukien, Box 15, File 1, E.R. Hughes to F.H. Hawkins 8/2/29. Hughes moved to the Shanghai YMCA and later left the missionary world altogether and became Reader in Chinese religion and philosophy in the University of Oxford and the author of such books as *The Invasion of China By the Western World* (London, 1937).

<sup>113</sup> Farrer Minute 6/7/32, BT 60/31/5/1.

to soothe Sino-Western relations).<sup>114</sup> An unofficial committee of academics and businessmen was brought together and their reaction was generally favourable. Leefe, for Mathesons, identified the problem as:

a tendency for youngsters arriving out in China to be either entirely unreceptive of the point of view of the native and to condemn every overture by them as requiring either an ignominious kowtow from us -... - or else to go the other extreme and in an impulsive effort to get a reputation for breadth of mind and condemn the institutions of their own country.<sup>115</sup>

A meeting was held at the DOT in September which included the usual China worthies.<sup>116</sup> Two things came of this, an offer from the sometime President of this Society, Sir Edward Denison Ross, Director of the School of Oriental Studies from 1916 to 1937, to run “Special Courses of Study for Commercial Students” and instructions to Consul A.G.N. Ogden to write a pamphlet.<sup>117</sup>

The School had had less commercial support in the 1920s than it expected after its creation in 1917, despite the involvement of the China Association in funding Chinese studies.<sup>118</sup> Numbers of students of Chinese peaked in 1923-4 but ever after they dropped, as a result of events in China and the depression, getting as low as 28 ten years later. In 1928 the School had run, for the first time, a special 3 month course for students sent by BAT, which was revising its use of foreign staff in China and needed trained linguists.<sup>119</sup> They were sent to London and then to the

<sup>114</sup> *Halliwell's Film Guide*, L. Halliwell, 7th Ed. (London, 1990), p. 383.

<sup>115</sup> Leefe to Crowe, 29/8/32, BT 60/31/5/18.

<sup>116</sup> Including Crowe, Sir Charles Addis, Arthur Balfour, Robert Waley Cohen, Hughes, E.M. Gull (secretary of the China Association) Stanley Dodwell and Pratt: “Minutes of a Meeting Held at the Department of Overseas Trade in 13th September 1932 to Discuss Anglo-Chinese Relations”, BT 60/31/5/35.

<sup>117</sup> Sir E. Denison Ross to Crowe, 14/11/32, BT 60/31/5/59a; A.G.N. Ogden, draft booklet, BT 60/31/5/70a, 1/2/33, .

<sup>118</sup> Through the association's Incorporated School of Practical Chinese, see SOAS - China Association - CHAS S.I.3.

<sup>119</sup> School of Oriental Studies, *Report of the Governing Body and Statement of Accounts*, 1928.

North China Union Language School in Beijing for a year. The effects of the London course are hard to quantify but one of the group felt that these once a week lessons only taught him the inadvisability of learning Mandarin in central London.<sup>120</sup> Still, two members of that course were later to write excellent memoirs about China, so that might point to some sort of success.<sup>121</sup>

In 1929 Commercial Certificates were awarded for the first time. Chartered Bank employees were prominent in receiving them. The School felt that its proper Chinese research suffered because the greater proportion of its students were on crash courses in basic Mandarin.<sup>122</sup> Not much seems to have come of the Denison Ross proposal although BAT and Swires sent a steady flow of people to the School after the mid-1930s.<sup>123</sup>

Whether the special courses would have produced Hughes' gentlemen is another question. One of the BAT draft certainly considered himself more interested and friendly towards the Chinese than most of his contemporaries but this had more to do with falling in love with a China-born English woman on the boat out, than any course at SOS.<sup>124</sup>

The booklet is actually quite good. Ogden's original text was fair but needed toning down to avoid unhelpful comments about the "ingrained" propensity of the Chinese to squeeze and lamenting the declining "general standard of commercial morality" among Chinese businessmen.<sup>125</sup> Hughes supplied chapters on Chinese history and culture and the Royal Institute of

---

<sup>120</sup> Maurice Lister, "Memoir", p. 16.

<sup>121</sup> John Logan, *China: Old and New* (Hong Kong, 1982), Maurice Lister, "Memoir", unpublished.

<sup>122</sup> *Report of the Advisory Committee together with other Documents respecting the China Indemnity* (London, 1926), pp. 152-53.

<sup>123</sup> 12 from BAT and 18 from Swires were registered from 1934 to 1936: SOAS CHAS S.I.3 Annual Reports 1934-35 to 1937-38.

<sup>124</sup> Maurice Lister, personal communication.

<sup>125</sup> Ogden, draft booklet, paras. 19, 17, BT 60/31/5/70a.

International Affairs a bibliography. It compares very favourably with the only other special guide I have found, the anonymous 1928 War Office Pamphlet *Notes on Shanghai*. How on earth the War Office and Legation expected its officers to retain a balanced view of things in Shanghai is hard to see, given a bibliography which recommended Gilbert's *What's Wrong with China*, Auxion De Ruffe's *Is China Mad?* and, for history, Bland and Backhouse's colourful but unreliable *China Under the Empress Dowager*. In an appendix entitled "Some Chinese Characteristics", echoing the Reverend Smith's famous book of the same name, it was announced that the Chinese mind was passive, the Chinese ignorant and gullible, selfishly individualist and "out of step with the world."<sup>126</sup> It's hardly surprising then, that most of the papers of military men that I have examined show them to be firmly in favour of harsher policies towards China than were ever employed.<sup>127</sup>

### In Conclusion

Ultimately all of this propaganda was wasted. It kept people like O.M. Green and Lionel Curtis employed but throughout the 1930s the reputation of Shanghai's foreign community got worse. Despite such genuine SMC innovations as the belatedly discovered interests in Chinese primary education in 1929 and public health in 1937 the old clichés stuck.<sup>128</sup> In 1933 Mrs Cecil K. Chesterton devoted a section of her *Young China*

---

<sup>126</sup> *Notes on Shanghai* (London, 1928), IOLR L/MIL/17/20/6.

<sup>127</sup> Ignorance about China was, of course, hardly confined to the military. There was actually a great deal of information in print and being disseminated about China in the 1920s but it could do little to combat, and indeed often fuelled, the erroneous or picturesque images of the Chinese peddled by sensationalist playwrights and novelists or the propagandists of the treaty ports. These images are discussed in detail in my "Changing British Attitudes to China and the Chinese, 1928-1931", (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1992), chapter 2, pp. 29-77.

<sup>128</sup> Jones, *Shanghai and Tientsin*, pp. 14-18.



and *New Japan* to the “Shanghai Mind”, and to the “No Dogs and Chinese” sign; much to the satisfaction of a reviewer in the *Listener* and the annoyance of the *North China Daily News* which declared that her “qualifications for putting any mind into the dock are obviously negligible.”<sup>129</sup> John Blofeld restated many of the standard complaints about behaviour in the 1920s and 1930s in a lecture to this Society in 1946.<sup>130</sup> From Hergé’s *Tintin* to Edgar Snow the best-selling writers were very critical of the foreign population of China. The best-selling of them all, Pearl Buck, ignored them completely in her fiction which, beginning with *The Good Earth* [1931], brought to life the inhabitants of the “rest” of China to such effect that it dominated Western attitudes to the country for two decades afterwards.<sup>131</sup> The foreign community in Shanghai truly became the irrelevance it had always really been in the wider context of China. The Japanese actions after 1931 and the Undeclared War after 1937 left the foreign communities in China on the sidelines and in suspension, a suspension that lasted until the real powerful forces at work in the country fought themselves out.

On top of this a series of salacious books sealed the city’s reputation, and have continued to. Who remembers or has read Green’s 1943 propaganda panegyric, *The Foreigner in China*, with its chapters on Jordan, Hart, Gordon, Green’s own servants and pidgin-English. Much more fun is to be had in Egon Kirsch’s *Secret China* [1935], Hauser’s *Shanghai: City for Sale* [1940] and Miller’s *Shanghai: Paradise of Adventurers* [1937]. These books have helped to erect a wall of legend around the city and its foreign inhabitants which makes it difficult to approach.

<sup>129</sup> NCH, 25/10/33, p. 124.

<sup>130</sup> John Blofeld, *Sino-British Cultural Relations: Report of an address by Mr John Blofeld*, (China Society: London, 1947).

<sup>131</sup> Harold Isaacs, *Scratches on Our Minds: American Images of China and India* (New York, 1958), pp. 155-58.

Fictional works have had a similar effect. Harriet Sergeant's recent book, *Shanghai* [1991], seems to have fallen into this trap. I think I have shown that this should not be surprising; foreign Shanghai has long had an image problem and serious attempts were made to change it, or at least to curtail the effects of it at times of political necessity.

The real problem was one of interpretation which foreign Shanghai was bound to lose over time. Our values today and relationships with other cultures have, at least publicly, improved immensely since the 1920s. It is easy to sound "unfair" about the Shanghai British but the social reality of that "place in time" has vanished; and now these myths are all that is left of it outside the academic histories.